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Eastern District of California

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ROSEVILLE MAN INDICTED FOR SHINING LASER AT TWO AIRCRAFT

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—Acting United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown announced today that a federal grand jury returned a two-count indictment charging BALLTAZAR O. VALLADARES, 29, of Roseville, Calif., with interference with the safe operation of an aircraft by shining a powerful handheld laser into the cockpit.

This case is the product of an investigation of the Federal Air Marshals, FBI, Sacramento Sheriff's Department, Roseville Police Department, and Sacramento Police Department.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal, who is prosecuting the case, the indictment alleges that VALLADARES interfered with and attempted to interfere with the safe operation of two different aircraft. The first was a jetliner that was on approach to Sacramento airport with 137 passengers aboard. The second was a law enforcement helicopter sent to investigate the laser hit on the jetliner. On the night of March 26, 2009, VALLADARES shined a green laser at each aircraft. After the helicopter crew located VALLADARES, Roseville police officers arrested him and recovered a laser from his residence.

"Today's indictment underscores the seriousness of such reckless conduct. Blinding a pilot with a laser puts lives at risk—whether it be the pilot, the passengers, or those living in the community over which the targeted aircraft is flying," stated Acting U.S. Attorney Brown.

This is the second such case prosecuted by the Eastern District of California U.S. Attorney's Office in recent months: in October 2008, a federal judge in Fresno sentenced Jared Dooley to two years in prison and Kendra Snow to 18 months in prison. Federal authorities have recognized lasing of aircraft as an increasingly serious problem and have formed a working group to investigate and prosecute offenders. This is because the focused beams of a laser remain powerful even at a long distance and can expose pilots to radiation levels above those considered to be flight safe. Brief exposure to even a relatively low-powered laser beam can cause discomfort and temporary visual impairments, such as glare, flash blind, and afterimages.

The maximum statutory penalty for a violation of interference with aircraft is 20 years in prison. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

The charges are only allegations and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Anyone with information regarding the use of lasers to interfere with aircrafts should contact the FBI.

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